

JADARA

Volume 12 | Number 4

Article 5

November 2019

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Recommended Citation

Barker, B. (2019). An Open Letter to ADARA Members. *JADARA*, 12(4). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol12/iss4/5>

AN OPEN LETTER TO ADARA MEMBERS

Ben Barker

Dear ADARA Colleagues:

In the short while that I have been active in the CSAVR's Committee on Services to the Deaf, I have become optimistic about the future. I would like to share with you some of my observations that constitute the basis for my optimism:

1. There seems to be a great and growing AWARENESS within the general public, the professional rehabilitation workers, et al, of the needs of the deaf and the dearth of services that are readily available to them. This has developed because of the more vocal demands of the deaf consumers, and is manifested by the growing numbers of states which are, through legislative procedures, instituting Commissions for the Deaf. With such Commissions, the resources available to public and private rehabilitation agencies will be enhanced by their support. While I do not perceive "Commissions" as controlling or operating agencies, I feel that they can do much in providing information and referral services, as well as supporting public and private agencies and schools which are working with the deaf.

2. I have had on occasion, two or three times, the opportunity to discuss rather superficially, some of the problems of the Deaf as I perceive them in the State/Federal partnership with the newly appointed Commissioner, Robert Humphreys. It is my belief that he has developed, in the short time that he has been with RSA, a growing understanding of the needs in VR of the Deaf Program. An example of his interest and concern was a memo that he wrote to each of the Regional Offices indicating the desirability of the presence of the RSA Regional Representative for the Deaf of attending our CSAVR Committee meeting in San Francisco last month. Some of the 10 Regional Representatives indicated that they would not have been present without this directive from the Commissioner. For the first time, all 10 of the Regional Representatives for the Deaf were present at a CSAVR Committee meeting. Much understanding and good came from this meeting.

3. We are heartened by the Notice of Inquiry by the Federal Communications Commission, that was released on February 13, 1978. This inquiry is to consider barriers to the Deaf of our present telephone system, the state of development of a TTY system for the deaf, and the feasibility of preferential rates to deaf persons by local telephone systems. Many persons, perhaps in this audience, are to be credited and commended for bringing this subject to the forefront of the business being conducted by the Federal Communications Commission.

4. In talking with some of the leadership within private, non-profit organizations, I have gained the impression that there is taking place a coalescence of these organizations. While each of the private organizations have a specific area of interest, they are now adopting a

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stance that could result in one loud, tremendous voice, speaking in behalf of Deaf persons within this country. Whether he be a Deaf consumer, an interpreter for the Deaf, a teacher in a Deaf facility or school, or a vocational rehabilitation counselor, he is seeing the necessity of organizations banding together towards a common goal of developing more resources and programs that will materially affect the lives of Deaf persons. Further, the groups and organizations concerned with the Deaf will be making their needs known to the legislative branch of the government in addition to those offices in the Executive Department. Organizational cooperation and coordination is of paramount importance to the future of the Deaf.

5. I was privileged to be with a group of RSA planners this week who are considering the possibility and feasibility of making the Deaf a part of what is known in HEW as Management Incentive Tracking System. This is a device or technique that is being used by the Secretary of the Department to ascertain what improvements are taking place among certain disabled groups. Those groups who are presently within this program are the blind and visually handicapped, the Social Security Disability Insurance Clients (SSDI), and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) clients. This suggestion originated, as I understand, with the Commissioner of RSA and is further evidence of his awareness and acknowledgement of need and support consideration for the Deaf.

I shall not, at this time, give you any details of this tracking system, but if it is adopted, I am certain that it will be of great benefit to the State/Federal rehabilitation program for the Deaf.

6. I was very much heartened by the establishment of the Research and Training Center 23 at the University of California in San Francisco. The very new R & T Center was a commitment to develop Mental Health Services for the Deaf. They will do research, as well as provide training to our practitioners. They are very ably led by Dr. Hilde Schlesinger. There is not an area that is more sorely needed in our Country than the development of these services for Deaf children and adults. We are convinced that much emotional disturbances among Deaf persons can be prevented with more knowledgeable parents and teachers. Hopefully, in the near future, this R & T Center can be of great assistance to regions and states in providing training materials and technical assistance consultation to our programs. The new R & T Center is operating on a "shoe string" and will require additional funds to make a serious impact upon this glaring deficit in our spectrum of services. We can assist by becoming knowledgeable about the Center, asking for services and communicating in our day to day activities with others about this new program.